

*Report of the
Evaluation Committee of
the John Carter Brown Library*

March 7, 2001





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Providence, Rhode Island

EVALUATION COMMITTEE

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I. *Introduction*

The inception of the External Evaluation Committee lay with the Board of Governors of the John Carter Brown Library. The Board appointed the committee, provided the charge, and met with it in early October 2000. Although the charge is broad and comprehensive, it does allow some flexibility in the emphasis of the committee's study. In a sense there are two points of departure for the committee: the first is the Report of the Evaluation Committee of the John Carter Brown Library (1980); the second, Self-Study (1998) prepared by the Director and staff.

Twenty years have elapsed since the last full external review. (The periodic reviews by the NEH are necessarily limited and therefore do not cover many areas of importance.) At the time of the last comprehensive review, computerization among other technologies had not yet made much of an impression in the academic world. Today these technologies are in the process of transforming almost all aspects of the collection and the preservation of materials vital to a full comprehension of a culture. These materials include rare and reference books, maps and charts, manuscripts, and much more. The suggestion is occasionally made that such materials have no inherent value, that indeed books, including rare books, should give way through digitization, scanning, and other means of reproduction to e-books or some other electronic marvel. As for libraries given to the acquisition and protection of such

materials, they are relics of a soon-to-be abandoned past. Presumably if such anticipation is to be credited, the John Carter Brown Library can be dispensed with as an old fashioned remnant of an obsolete culture, interesting perhaps to antiquarians but of no real use in the brave new world.

We have put this matter in extravagant, even apocalyptic, terms to point up our belief that the John Carter Brown Library must be cherished and nourished. For the Library houses and tends with affection and care imprints and other resources that are in themselves expressions of a culture, old but with strong links to our own today. There is in the Library a high responsibility to the present (and future) to preserve the artifacts of this culture. For the holdings of the JCB are indispensable for an understanding of the past and the present, and many of course have a beauty that can no longer be reproduced.

The JCB has also become a superb center of scholarship and study in the last two decades. It attracts scholars from all over the world and provides the support and service that makes possible their use of the collections. But more than that, it furnishes its own sort of stimulation in an environment that encourages intellectual exchange. This environment is enriched by Brown University. Its faculty and students bring special qualities to the Library and generally contribute to a setting that enriches intellectual life in the Library.

Such institutions as rare book libraries, state and local historical societies, and small isolated museums always run the risk of falling into provincialism if they fail to seek connections with the outer world. An institution in close contact with a university and sitting on a campus, such as the JCB is, can with the right leadership avoid this unhappy fate. In the present Director the JCB has had such leadership. Previous Directors seem to have put their efforts into building the collection and getting their own scholarly work done. Both

tasks were important and deserve praise. But whatever these Directors did or did not do, the JCB, a small institution with a small staff, remained, as far as the scholarly world was concerned, an intellectual backwater. To be sure it had great collections—not often used but of dazzling quality—and it preserved these collections meticulously. The JCB welcomed those who learned of its holdings and wished to use them; in fact, it has always been hospitable. But it did not go out of its way to advertise itself and it offered little financial aid to those who came to its reading room.

To be sure there is much more in its circumstances that gives energy and breadth of vision to the JCB: it has a Board sensitive to the requirements of scholarship and the importance of cultural life. The steady stream of visiting scholars from all over the world, mentioned above, also contributes much to the breadth and vigor of its activity. The Library's public programs, its exhibitions of a sample of its holdings, its publications all help make it valuable to the world outside of the usual university orbit. The JCB is in a number of ways, then, a cultural force—a vibrant institution of humanistic culture of permanent value.

II. *Functioning of the Library*

A. ADMINISTRATION: INTERNAL

Given the present excellence of the Library and all its operations, it may seem presumptuous to suggest that changes be made in its administrative organization. But though the present organization has been made to yield splendid results, it has a peculiarly fragile character. The fragility inheres in the way power and authority are distributed in the John Carter Brown Library. The center of both clearly lies with the Director to an unusual degree. It is also clear that the extraordinary period of growth and progress enjoyed by the JCB—now approaching twenty years—stems from the leadership of its extraordinarily gifted Director.

As far as internal operations are concerned the Director has infused the institution with his imagination and drive. His hand can be seen everywhere in the JCB: most dramatically in its lively and important research program but also in the building of the Caspersen Wing, fundraising, public programs, collection policy and development, in planning and instituting—incomplete to be sure—the computerization of the catalogue and the ordinary operations of the institution. As this list suggests (and it could be extended) the greatest change in the last two decades in the JCB's organizational (or managerial) history has come in the definition of the Director's job. The record of this period indicates that the present Director has redefined the responsibilities of his office much to the advantage of the institution.

The benefits of this redefinition and performance far outweigh the costs, but there are costs, the principal one being paid by the staff. The organizational chart indicates one aspect of the costs—with one exception all the reporting lines lead with no intervening points to the Director. The exception is the reference librarian whose immediate superior is the assistant librarian for operations. This system works because the Director has the ability to transmit some of his own large energies and imagination to those who work under him. But, perhaps, an organization somewhat removed from the Director might release initiatives and perspectives that surely exist within the staff. We offer no firm or clear organizational pattern different from the existing one. But we can suggest that an assistant librarian, a genuine deputy, might serve as a conduit between Director and staff. This change would entail shifting several responsibilities to the deputy director. We are not recommending that an additional appointment be made, but only a different allocation of work. The deputy's authority might be extended to all departments. A second part of an organizational change might place the reference librarian and the chief cataloguer under the curator of European books. That official would report to the deputy director. Those in charge of finances and public programs would continue to report to the Director. None of these suggestions is intended to reduce the Director's power to make the institution effective and responsible, but rather to release further initiatives from the staff and remove some pressure from the Director.

Allocation and Training of the Staff

In several sections of this report, we ask questions or discuss matters that in several respects turn on the allocation and quality of staff. For the most part we believe that the

JCB possesses a fine staff. We do have questions, however, regarding certain aspects of staff policy and practice.

1. We believe that in the next few years the JCB should add a curator of British and American books and manuscripts. A major part of the collection now consists of British and American materials, but there is no curator dedicated to this broad field. The European Curator certainly has a competence in the British area, but his primary interest (and knowledge) lies in Continental books. The present Director is an Anglo-American specialist and long ago established his distinction as a scholar. Considering all that a Director of the JCB does, it seems sensible to relieve him of the responsibility of acting as a curator in the British-American field. This new curatorship should be fully endowed before an appointment is made.
2. The JCB should examine its use of temporary and grant-funded staff. Some sort of balance is desirable short of heavy dependence on such staff. Considerations of morale must be factored into the equation for an optimum relationship of permanent and temporary staff, especially in a small institution such as the JCB. Professionals with many years of experience in the cataloguing department, for example, smart from any lack they perceive in parity with the permanent staff. There are to a lesser extent similar feelings elsewhere in the JCB. Morale aside, retention of highly competent temporary or grant-funded staff can also become difficult.

The JCB is not large enough to justify adding a specialist charged to establish staff development programs. It has not offered formal in-service staff training, as far as we know. Rather curators, librarians, and cataloguers come to the Library with professional training, usually in some tradition-

al humanistic discipline, such as history or a West European language. If specialized training is needed, it is given on the job. The JCB practice does not depart in this regard from the usual arrangements in other independent research libraries.

It is not a bad system and it seems to work well. We believe that formal programs that included some training not easily given on the job, for example programs that involved short periods of study at comparable institutions, might enrich it. Knowledge of how someone else does things is not always transferable, but it is useful because of the perspective gained on one's own operations. And of course the possibility exists that someone else does it better than you do, and you can learn new and better methods.

Staff development should also include support for travel to professional meetings, and recognition and rewards for publishing in journals. Encouragement of activity relating to one's calling will always pay off: skill in the craft will be increased and morale improved, among other benefits. We are aware that the JCB offers funds for travel and certainly approves of staff development. Our concern is that more attention be given to these matters and more system in encouraging staff development be introduced. Whatever is done—establishing new programs, adding to staff development funds, creating in-service training and the like—should be well publicized in the JCB. The staff will respond to all such efforts and should be fully informed of all of them.

B. EXTERNAL GOVERNANCE: THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS

In a real sense, characterizing the Board's functions as "external" is inaccurate. The Board holds the primary financial responsibility for the JCB, and it serves the institution in indispensable ways. It has acted in splendid fashion in fund-raising and it has helped maintain focus on the central purposes of the Library. In a recent meeting, for example, it shifted resources from the Divestiture Fund into acquisitions, a sensitive and thoughtful action. The Board of Governors is obviously not one of the problems of the JCB; it is one of its strengths.

Our knowledge of the Board does not extend much beyond its public performance and its membership. We cannot therefore comment on its internal operations—how it does its work in other words. We do know that it acts under a constitution that is both written and unwritten. Among the written sources of its authority are the original agreement made with the trustees of the estate of John Nicholas Brown in 1901 and the various instructions given the Committee of Management between 1901 and 1904. Undoubtedly the precedents that were created by the Management Committee over a period of eighty years, and its replacement, the Board of Governors founded in 1984, are virtually as important. During the years of its existence the Board has fashioned its own procedures that, *mutatis mutandis*, exist in comparable boards. We refer here to committees, motions, voting, reports, and discussions, for example.

We cannot recommend improvements either in the organizational structure or procedures of the Board. None appears now to be needed. Yet we cannot resist suggesting that times of harmony are the best times to examine one's methods of doing one's business. Should discord ever replace harmony in an organization such as a board, it is advantageous to have a clear idea of what the essential rules are.

C. FINANCE

Financial matters assert themselves in almost every aspect of the JCB's life. Balancing the budget while maintaining high standards requires a delicate touch, good management of the endowment (provided that the basic sum is sufficient), prudence, and good luck. The JCB met all the requirements last year and is in balance, indeed boasts a small surplus. Both the Board of Governors and the Director deserve full credit for this happy situation.

This committee asked the Board if the JCB might be better off if it stood completely on its own feet, abandoning the arrangement with the University which required payment of \$168,000 a year (the "maintenance fee") for a variety of services. We were not surprised to learn that the Board believed that the JCB gets its money's worth. The \$168,000 pays for custodial service, utilities, building maintenance, and it is assumed, some other university services, such as payroll, some accounting and personnel work, legal advice, exterior security, and some of the basic costs of having its telephone system integrated into the University's.

The allocation of income from the JCB's endowment among the various functions of the institution seems reasonable to us. We have already remarked on, with approval, the Board's decision in October 2000 to shift funds in order to increase acquisitions. But we recognize that such a change will limit future increases in the operating budget. This consequence of a necessary action provides evidence, if any is needed, of the necessity of increasing the institution's endowment. That need, somewhat softened perhaps by the recently thriving market, will probably assert itself again soon.

D. OPERATIONS

Reader Services and Security

Our discussion of the research and fellows program touches at certain points the service given readers. Quite simply put, the JCB gives its users much, and all those we spoke with declared their satisfaction. This included Brown University faculty, scholars from inside and outside the United States, and students at the University.

Security of the collections continues to be a matter of concern to all libraries. JCB policy regarding the screening of readers, the use of video monitors, and staff awareness of the need to protect the collections seem intelligent, though the monitoring may be disconcerting for a time to visitors. That service and security should be in balance is clearly recognized.

The JCB has also thought through how service at the front desk should play into security. The Library's practice requires that the permanent professional staff, including the Director, each take a turn at the desk in the MacMillan Reading Room. (We will confess that we doubt whether the Director's tour of duty at the desk is the best use of his time, but we recognize that in a small institution such willingness has a particular value.) Rotation of staff—perhaps too frequent rotation—may occasionally threaten to produce indifferent or uninformed scrutiny of occurrences in the room. On the other hand, the JCB is aware of this danger and as the watch changes throughout the day, care in briefings by one staff member to the next is observed.

Technology

This committee's comments on the applications of computer technology must necessarily be limited. In any case the JCB has received advice from the University's Center for

Information Technology (noted in the JCB's Self-Study) and from The Donohue Group, Inc. (October 2000). The Donohue Group has written an exhaustive review of information technology in the JCB and provided a staggering number of recommendations. We have neither the experience nor the competence to assess much that the Donohue Group has suggested. We can, however, offer certain general considerations for the JCB as it attempts to master the new world of information technology.

1. Before it makes any major decisions involving important changes and major expense, the JCB should review carefully the character of its own institutional purposes and the work that presently goes into fulfilling them. The technology is a means; it has no other value.
2. Although the JCB enjoys a large measure of autonomy, it has important connections to the University and several of its units, especially its libraries. All changes should, if possible, tie the JCB and the University closer together. (The words "if possible" are not weasel words, and though we recognize that in certain matters increased ties might not be useful to either institution, there are many economies and efficiencies to be gained by collaboration.)
3. There is no need to reinvent the wheel. Wide consultation in the planning stage is essential. The JCB is not a member of the Independent Research Libraries Association, but the members of that league would surely be pleased to be asked for advice. So also, of course, would the University's specialists. All we are doing here is commending the JCB for its work with University specialists in and out of the University Library.

4. The Donohue Group's review notes in Appendix A that one staff member has observed "that there is resistance to change of any kind"; not a surprising observation, but one that indicates that staff involvement early on, and including full information about planning, is necessary.

Publications

In its Self-Study, the JCB refers to the "voracious publication monster" that inhabits the building, drawing nourishment from the staff and the budget. It suggests that it needs a part-time publication assistant, but almost as an afterthought muses on the possibility of publishing less. Publishing less might be accomplished by limiting itself to one substantial publication every two years it says. The publications of the JCB known to us are excellent—well conceived, usually handsome, and useful.

What should be done regarding the scale of publishing? Before any firm decision about the size and scope of the program is made the JCB should establish its costs of the program, say for a recent year and for several recent books (bibliography, essays, e.g.). The costs of printing can of course be precisely determined. The costs in staff energy and time are less easily established, but they should receive close study. The exact value of publications to the reputation of the JCB and to the laudable purpose of maintaining its image in the lay and scholarly worlds cannot be established. We assume that the JCB is correct in its belief that some sort of presence is necessary, and a publication program adds to the effort given in public programs.

On balance, though we do not know the answers to the questions asked above, we believe that the publication program might be reduced. Time, energy, and money are precious and could be better expended elsewhere. We suggest that lim-

iting major publications, as the JCB proposes, might offer a helpful way of reducing the program. There is a second, perhaps better way: publish only books—guides, exhibition catalogues, and bibliographies, for example—that make known the collection and assist scholars in using it. Avoid publishing books that university presses might handle. Books of essays, unless they are bibliographical in nature, are examples of what we have in mind. Diaries, collections of letters, and conventional works of scholarship are other examples.

As things stand now, the JCB's publishing program is extra duty—everybody and nobody is primarily responsible for it. Hiring a specialist will no doubt stimulate the program unless restraint is imposed. For the most part an increase in publications is not desirable.

Public Programs and Fundraising

The conjunction of public programs and fundraising implies that the first is in the service of the second. This relationship often holds true, but even if the JCB did not seek outside funding there would be good reasons for public programs. In the largest terms the JCB exists to serve the public, and though the primary part of that public lies in scholarship, the outside world, the lay public also deserves thoughtful attention. Vigorous and profound scholarly production has, of course, meaning for laymen, but the scholarship that drives public programs, lectures and exhibitions for example, also contributes to the public interest.

The institutions that maintain healthy ties with lay communities also benefit from these connections. There are few things more advantageous to anyone engaged in intellectual and artistic life than having to explain their work from the ground up, in other words to examine and test their fundamental assumptions to non-specialists. Nobel laureates who

teach freshmen courses in universities understand this principle well. Without the challenge, indeed the demand, to explain the essential presuppositions of his intellectual labors, anyone whose mind is his master runs the risk of becoming isolated and provincial.

Of course, public programs help raise money, and that reason alone would justify maintaining a public presence. The JCB has certainly stretched itself in staying active in the larger community, and it has insisted, correctly we believe, that all that it has done has advanced its fundraising programs.

Fundraising

The JCB has examined its Associates program recently and has decided to upgrade it; that is, make it a fully functioning "professional" activity. This is a wise decision and we endorse it fully. Raising large sums will remain the responsibility of the Board of Governors and the Director. The Board probably wishes to examine its own participation in every aspect of fundraising. It has been remarkably successful, and imagining how it might do even better is not easy. Still it is a study that the Board should undertake for itself.

III. *The Collection*

Collection Policy, Acquisitions, and Conservation

We have commented on the recent increase in funds for acquisitions. The JCB's practice of dedicating twenty percent of the acquisition budget to cataloguing is commendable, as is the policy of allocating five percent to conservation. The JCB apparently has little choice but to rely on outside specialists to do its conservation work. An in-house department would be preferable, but institutional size, budget, and need make such a department impossible.

Collection policy has been well defined for many years, and the JCB reviews it periodically. One recent addition to the list of fields to be developed is the fruit of such review. The JCB has always collected books about America and books printed in America (up to 1825), but until recently there has been no explicit policy to collect books neither printed in nor about America but influential in America in its long colonial period. Without intending to collect such books, the JCB has in fact acquired many books meeting this description. One thinks of political theory, theology, and literature—all these areas are represented in the collections by books neither printed in nor about America. To avow such a collection policy and to follow through on it is an important step.

Cataloguing

This subject presents the most intractable problem confronted in this review. The problem is, stated simply, how to make information available about the full extent of the Library's collection, volume by volume. The most important part of the collection—rare books, i.e., books printed before ca. 1825—constitutes one of the finest in the world and is the glory of the institution. The Report of the Evaluation Committee of the John Carter Brown Library (1980) in sketching the history of cataloguing in the Library pointed out "that appropriate cataloguing of the collection is a primary requirement if the Library is to be effectively used" and recommended the year 1990 as a target date for the "completion" of the process. Ten years later most of the necessary work remains to be done with only twenty-seven percent of the collection in the electronic database.

To its credit the Library has long recognized the "problem" and the need to solve it. In the last twenty years working through RLIN, it has made commendable progress. Like most research libraries it has attempted to fashion computerized records for the electronic database and at the same time added printed cards to its card catalogue. The progress is praiseworthy, yet clearly most of the collection is not available to scholars and other libraries outside the institution.

While the Library is aware of its cataloguing problem, it may not feel the urgency found in others to find a remedy. In its Self-Study of 1998, it notes that other rare book libraries find themselves in a similar fix. Such institutions as the Folger, the Library Company of Philadelphia, and the American Antiquarian Society, it reports, offer no more than ten to thirty percent of their records on-line. (The figures for

the Morgan and Newberry are eighty and fifteen percent respectively.) We have recently learned that the Folger has added to its electronic catalogue many more records and now has sixty to sixty-five percent of its collection on-line. It has made this rapid progress through a program of retrospective cataloguing and now plans to have its entire collection available in electronic form in two years. The Folger, the Library Company, and the American Antiquarian Society have all resorted to cataloguing projects funded by grants and used temporary staff to do much of the work. The John Carter Brown Library has followed a similar path and at present has three specialists working on the Spanish American and Portuguese collections, a project of some 7,000 titles. The Library estimates that to complete this assignment will take about six years. It notes that it does not have sufficient grant money to carry this project through, but believes that its prospects are promising for getting renewal of support. As for the entire collection covering all fields, it might well have 20,000 rare books, almost half of its holdings, catalogued and on-line by the year 2003. It rightly claims that this would constitute "excellent progress."

This progress will depend in part on the performance of an "adaptive cataloguer," the Library's name for a specialist who uses the records of other institutions that have books also held in the John Carter Brown Library. The local practice for a little more than three years was to use the information gained from others for the most basic entries, but to modify it by adding the differences in JCB copies. Altogether the recent effort added 2,600 entries to the electronic file, on average about 1,000 titles per year.

We have learned from our discussions with JCB personnel that adaptive cataloguing leaves them feeling slightly queasy, an understandable reaction given their high stan-

dards and pride in their work. The proposal that they take a further step and produce an electronic record containing only the most basic information transforms queasiness into nausea. Such a record would be composed of much simplified entries for all the rare books in the collection not yet catalogued and available on-line. Yet the Self-Study declares that something of the sort is very much in the Library's vision, "a data base, which will be 'sortable' by author, title, and date of imprint," but distinct from the Library's formal catalogue. Made accessible through the Web, this set of records would enable scholars throughout the world to discover what the JCB has and does not have. It must include essential, but not complete, information about each book.

This kind of entry would be very useful to scholars at a distance—especially if "sortable" includes access by subject as well as author, title, and imprint. But the reaction to this suggestion for a diminished catalogue in our discussions with the cataloguing staff was hardly favorable. The staff argues that the general contents of the collection are well known and that most items are recorded in various reference sources. Most important perhaps is the staff's evident fear that a short-title catalogue will never be replaced by a full and satisfactory listing and that the flaws and omissions would remain as attention turned to new acquisitions, which in the best of all possible worlds would be fully and meticulously catalogued. It contends that the responsibility of making certain that the defective and incomplete entries would be corrected and completed as they were discovered and the whole retrospective record brought up to standard would lose its attractiveness as time passed.

We suspect that there is one additional objection—largely unspoken. It is the perception that anything less than a first-rate catalogue would diminish the staff's professional

standing. While unlikely, there is the possibility that the staff would become pariahs in their profession if it produces imperfect records. And, to be sure, a history of work in an institution that accepted second-rate standards could not add to its luster. Such a reputation could not fail to affect morale, and a depressed staff would erode the fine spirit now so clear in the JCB.

Scholars with whom we have discussed this matter all agree that an on-line record of JCB's holdings would be very helpful. They point to the obvious: to discover whether the Library's collection would be useful to them sometimes, perhaps often, requires a trip to Providence. If the full extent of the collection were available on-line, much preparatory work could be done before an actual visit to Providence was made. This point surely needs little additional comment.

How the Library should undertake the task of getting information on all its holdings on-line cannot be easily determined. Other institutions with larger collections and, undoubtedly, more money, have chosen several methods. The Huntington Library, with some 400,000 rare books, tracts, pamphlets and the like has used outside contractors. It is not entirely pleased with the results, but it sought to make a very large collection accessible to scholars. The Huntington's staff has discovered mistakes in the new record and is determined to correct them. But errors notwithstanding, it has persisted and its on-line database, in its entirety, will appear on the World Wide Web in summer 2001. To be sure, many of the Huntington's holdings are in early English books, an area of printed works much studied by bibliographers, cataloguers, and scholars for many years. The Short-Title Catalogue (Pollard and Redgrave), the Wing studies, and the work on eighteenth-century imprints done in southern California institutions have simplified the task.

And the Huntington's leadership has not shrunk from the errors that have been made in the project, but rather have proceeded with the main work of cataloguing and in correcting mistakes whenever they have been found.

The Bancroft Library (Berkeley) has followed a slightly different course in cataloguing its collection, now numbering some 250,000 books, all available on-line. It did the job itself, using its own staff nourished by large grants. "Copy-cataloguing," the Bancroft's term for the JCB's adaptive cataloguing, served in this project. But as in the other cases discussed above, the Bancroft has had to live with imperfection. It does insist, however, that it is determined to remedy mistakes in its electronic records. Whether it will ever bring the collection entries up to an ideal standard, one that recognizes the peculiarities of its own copies of books, is not clear. But there is no denying that its holdings can be accessed from afar and made useful to scholars everywhere.

We are not entirely comfortable in recommending a diminution in standards. But a rough and ready catalogue with all its imperfections would assist scholars unable to visit the JCB, and it would also inform other institutions of the dimensions of the collection. We are aware of the difficulties facing cataloguers in the JCB as they work on this collection, one that includes many books printed before 1800 and thus likely to have copy-specific features. There are also a significant number of books in the collection that are unique as far as the JCB knows—single copies not to be found anywhere else. Still considering the need, we are convinced that an imperfect catalogue on-line is better than none at all.

The conclusion to our review of this matter seems inescapable. The JCB should undertake as soon as possible a major effort to complete the electronic database of its rare books. It should accept imperfection in the end product with

the resolve to make corrections whenever they are discovered. In time, the quality of the database can be improved. What is essential now is to make available as much information as possible in short-title form to scholars and other institutions.

We will end this review of cataloguing by reporting that recently the JCB has turned even more of its attention to matters discussed above. Stimulated by the report of the Donohue Group, it has begun to plan its next steps. The most important of these might lie in an opportunity to use records and expertise provided by the English Short-Title project to get the JCB's English language books on-line. If this opportunity bears fruit, it will increase the pace of cataloguing without enormous expense and, according to the staff's projections, produce on-line listings of most of the rare book collection by year-end 2008. As far as the titles not in English are concerned, help is not far away. The John Hay Library stands ready to share its experience and expertise. Some years ago it conducted a major retrospective project of its own with the assistance of OCLC. Using the Library's shelf list, among other data, OCLC found ways of getting the peculiarities of books in the John Hay Library into the electronic database along with the usual standard information. To test the value of this experience of its neighbor, the JCB might run a sample against OCLC or RLIN records. We have been assured by the John Hay Library of its eagerness to help in any such project.

An additional, related point should be noted: RLIN will cease to produce cards in the very near future. Will the JCB then begin to produce its own cards rather than close the card catalogue, thereby adding yet another process to the cataloguing operation, further slowing things down? Is the JCB committed to maintaining the card catalogue indefinitely? We believe that it should use the opportunity provided by the RLIN's action and close the card catalogue now.

IV. *Relations with Brown University*

Administrative and Financial

For the most part, relations between the University administration and the JCB are good, indeed even solid and comfortable. That this relationship exists is remarkable, considering the JCB's long tradition of autonomy. To be sure, there are formal arrangements that deflect tension that might arise from the striking fact that the JCB runs its own affairs in ways not common in the usual university setting. After all, the President of the University is a member of the Board of Governors, the Director holds an adjunct professorship in the Department of History, and the Faculty Liaison Committee (appointed by the President) gives useful service to the JCB in its process of appointing short-term fellows and on occasion stands-in as an advisory committee to the Director. And the chair of the Faculty Liaison Committee sits as an ex officio member of the Board of Governors.

Not surprisingly, despite the links mentioned above and the good feeling, strains occasionally occur on the administrative level. They usually appear in matters concerning money. The latest difficulty (as far as we know) has arisen over the JCB's stewardship in the financial administration of the Library of Latin America (LOLA). This series, though smaller in scope, resembles the Library of America series, a

reprint collection of distinguished books by North American writers since the founding of the English colonies. LOLA proposes to reprint about thirty-five titles by Latin American writers of fiction and non-fiction. These books, written originally in Spanish or Portuguese, will appear in English as well as in each of the two languages of Latin America. Oxford University Press will serve as publisher, financed by grants by the Lampadia, Mellon, and Rockefeller foundations. The JCB has already received over \$300,000 with which to pay editors and translators.

These arrangements should not yield disagreements with the University offices that handle JCB accounts, but they have. Brown's controller works within rules that apparently cannot easily accommodate the obligations the JCB has assumed. We have been led to believe that in time the problems posed by the JCB's part in this project—a worthy effort in our eyes—can be worked out. Still, both sides have felt aggrieved and time and sweat have been wasted.

In a sense this tempest in a teapot is symptomatic of the larger misunderstanding that has disordered the relationship of the JCB and the financial authorities of the University. We will not condemn either side. To close the wounds suffered by each is beyond our competence, but we can prescribe one necessary step in the healing process: the President's office and the Chair of the Board of Governors should intervene and establish the basic rules of accommodation. The JCB is different from other units in the University. Recognition of that fact is surely essential in establishing a healthy relationship between the two institutions.

The JCB's administration believes that the larger problem—persistent tension regarding financial affairs—might largely be eliminated by the granting of greater financial autonomy to it. It argues that its ability to raise money from

the federal government and foundations is impeded by its connection to Brown University. It does not propose secession, or complete independence; it realizes with genuine gratitude that the University gives it much and always has. All it desires is a separate tax identification number (in the jargon of the trade, 501(c)(3) status). Such status will change nothing, nothing that is except the perceptions of federal agencies, foundations, and other donors.

If beauty is in the eye of the beholder, financial independence is in 501(c)(3) status. Is this a trivial matter? Clearly not, because several foundations, federal agencies, and a number of private donors will give to a library they believe enjoys separateness, but not to one joined to Brown.

The Folger Library maintains a relationship with Amherst College that is roughly comparable to the JCB's with Brown. In comparing the two, we are aware that their histories, cultures, and collections differ in important respects. Still they have something in common when it comes to appealing to the outside world for money. Although the Folger sits at a distance from Amherst, it does not enjoy separate 501(c)(3) status. As in the case of the JCB its endowment is commingled with Amherst's. The financial offices of Amherst provide some payroll services, and some personnel work is done there. These joint operations run smoothly we are told, perhaps because one financial officer in the college does nothing but Folger's work. Whatever the causes and the conditions of the relationship, the Folger seems contented and has no plans to seek financial independence.

Although we can see the reasons for the JCB's desire for separate 501(c)(3) status, we recommend that great caution be used in exploring this matter. We have been given to understand that a legal thicket surrounds 501(c)(3) status, and we

are certain that the University harbors strong feelings about the JCB's desire for financial independence. If the University is reluctant to agree to 501(c)(3) status for the JCB, the matter should be dropped immediately, indeed not even raised for discussion.

Departments and Academic Program

We have alluded to this matter above (in the Introduction), but not in a systematic way. Perhaps the most important formal connection the University and JCB have is the Faculty Liaison Committee, a body appointed by the President from several academic departments. This committee serves in several ways, formally as an advisory board that helps in the selection of short-term fellows. Equally important at times is its informal function as an adviser to the Director in all sorts of matters concerning the two institutions. An academic program made up of lectures, conferences, workshops, and seminars has drawn the two institutions together. Just as promising and important are the classes held at the JCB—faculty bring their students to the Library, and the Library provides information on its holdings as well as space for class meetings. The individual students who come to the JCB find a ready welcome when they arrive with questions or in search of subjects for study. The JCB's facilities are not lavish, and vacant rooms for meetings of any sort are at a premium, but faculty and students are greeted with friendliness and interest.

Given the warm welcome faculty and students receive, we suggest that the JCB might give a part of its efforts a more formal organization by offering in most years a small seminar, meeting once a week for one semester, for undergraduates on some aspect of its holdings—principally rare books and maps. The purpose of such a course would be to

stimulate interest, knowledge, and affection for such artifacts; some students in time would become connoisseurs, we trust, and occasionally, we hope, collectors and eventually donors to libraries.

The staff of the JCB probably does not have the time to give such a course, even once a year. To ease the burden a small endowment should be established for the seminar, and a visitor from another library or the book-trade called upon to give the course. (We have tried to frame this proposal in such a way as not to intrude on the normal functioning of the Library.)

Members of the Liaison Committee with whom we met praised the readiness and the competence shown by the JCB staff in meeting the various sorts of service they requested. The Liaison Committee is composed of faculty most interested in the Library and its holdings, and these faculty are more likely than their peers to use what is offered. Several spoke to us about the advantages of holding class meetings in the JCB. Several also remarked not only on such benefits but also on the JCB's existence at Brown as an inducement in recruiting faculty for the University. At least one member of the committee also told us of his own experience in drawing on JCB prints in illustrating a book he published.

None of these reports is surprising. Nor is the conclusion of the JCB's recent Self-Study that the University might make greater use of the JCB, remarking on the "unrealized potential" of the relationship. As far as we can tell, responsibility for the failure to realize this potential lies more with the University than with the JCB. This conclusion should not be understood as condemnation of either the faculty or the administration of the University. Part of the obstacle to closer ties surely lies in the composition of the faculty in the Humanities and Social Sciences. The disciplines in these two

broad fields are many and complicated, and many aspects of them have no relevance to the JCB's collection.

Although we recognize the difficulties, we are convinced that the University might consider planning a part of its recruitments with the JCB in mind. There is evidence indeed that the Department of History has agreed to do just that. Atlantic World studies has been recognized in recent years as offering a fruitful entrance into the study of New World empires and the interaction of America with Europe. Both Harvard and Johns Hopkins have established programs that demonstrate the power of such an approach. We were told in our meetings with the Liaison Committee that Brown's Department of History has recently discussed focusing several new recruitments so as to take advantage of fresh conceptions of early modern history featuring Atlantic studies. This interest is in part reinforced by the recognition of the uses of the JCB's rich collection. We trust that the JCB will continue to encourage such turns in University planning.

V. Research and Fellowship Program

Besides our own observation, all the evidence we have seen including reports and other documents produced by the JCB and the oral testimony and written statements by fellows and staff indicates that research in the Library is thriving. The collection of the Library and its reference books plus those available at the Rockefeller and John Hay Libraries seem satisfactory to virtually all users. This judgment may be skewed by the fact that most of the comment we have is from scholars on fellowships who came to the Library knowing to some extent what was available. All their surprises were, therefore, pleasant as they discovered unsuspected sources in their fields. Those who come for short-term stays, without funding from the Library, may not be as well prepared. But we suspect that even most of the quick visits are rewarding.

The atmosphere at the JCB reassures scholars. The large reading room is lovely—and quiet—and the small things that nourish study such as photocopying and computers are more than satisfactory. The staff gives excellent service—promptly and efficiently. Readers praise its knowledge, friendliness, and willingness to help in solving all sorts of problems from finding housing to running down obscure references.

Undoubtedly, long-term fellows have it best. There may now be as many as five or six a year—several supported by the NEH for terms of five to nine months, two or three by a Mellon grant for the same length of time, and a Senior

Research Fellow also funded by the Mellon Foundation for five to nine months. Two other foundations, the Arthur and Alice Adams Foundation and the Lampadia Foundation, also fund a five-month fellowship, restricted to scholars from Argentina, Brazil, or Chile. Fellows work in the collections and have space in carrels (or offices). Having an office allows researchers to write as well as to do research. The two activities complement one another and thereby help the scholars to remain fresh and energetic.

The mix of scholars in residence also contributes much to the fruitfulness of the JCB's program. We have examined the records of the long-term fellows (with stays of five to ten months) in the last four years, and have found them to be an impressive group. There have been fourteen in this period. Historians make up more than half of their number; the others included a bibliographer, several anthropologists, and at least two specialists in national literatures.

Although the research projects of these scholars vary widely, all are grounded in the Library collection. This fact alone demonstrates the richness of the JCB's holdings. For the subjects of research of these scholars range from the historiography of the United States to the poetry of John Milton. In between, so to speak, we find the history of the Incas from an anthropological angle of vision, slavery in the Caribbean, political language in the Americas, race in eighteenth-century British narratives, seventeenth-century Lima, American Indians, among others of equal interest.

We spoke only with the group working in the JCB in fall 2000, and found that they learned from one another and were in fact stimulated by their differences in methods as well as subjects. Working alone and intensively during an academic leave can be an isolating experience. The isolation of course has its advantages, but on the other hand the

opportunity for focus and concentration it offers can narrow vision and present the old dilemma of not being able to see the forest for the trees. The variety of fields at the JCB thus provides a happy setting. It is of course reinforced by the JCB's location on the campus of a very good university filled with interesting and accomplished minds. But the JCB has not been content to rely on the circumstances furnished by the setting and this scholarly blend, but has invigorated the scene by establishing a marvelous weekly meeting for its researchers and staff with interested scholars in the area. We refer here to the justly famous Wednesday lunch given by the JCB. At this meeting those in attendance receive more than a meal: they hear a report on research in terms accessible to all, if the one we listened to was representative of the lot, and they meet and talk with others whom they probably would not otherwise encounter. Because it is a regularly scheduled occasion, dependable in the intellectual as well as the gastronomic fare it offers, it has become a part of the intellectual life of the Northeast. We heard praise for this "institution"—it is so well accepted and so dependable the word is justified—from all with whom we spoke. The JCB deserves credit for an innovation that elsewhere might have been provided for by a university.

One final aspect of the JCB's program deserves comment though it is something of a hybrid, one part scholarship and one part public service. We refer to the lectures, workshops, conferences, and publications that fuse scholarship with the needs of laymen and specialists. Undoubtedly some of these gatherings have greater value than others for the fellows. But virtually all bring scholars together and on occasion in contact with interested laymen.

VI. *Conclusion*

Our principal recommendations (embedded in the report) are as follows:

1. That the JCB give greater emphasis to completing the cataloguing of the collection—the principal means should be adaptive cataloguing producing basic electronic records on-line;
2. That the Director, with the advice of the Board and counsel of the staff, reorganize the management structure of the institution;
3. That the JCB establish a staff development program;
4. That the balance of permanent and temporary staff be reviewed (good policy, we believe, calls for a larger complement of permanent staff than is presently in place);
5. That a curator of British and American books be appointed;
6. That the Board examine its constitution and its procedures, and that basic rules of accommodation between the University administration and the JCB be established;
7. That computerization of all appropriate functions proceed—with caution and after consultation with the University and members of IRLA;

8. That a modest decrease in the publication program be made;
9. That public programs be maintained at the present level;
10. That the Associates program be upgraded and integrated into a more ambitious development program;
11. That collection policy be maintained and expanded to include selectively books influential in the Americas;
12. That the card catalogue be closed;
13. That the JCB establish a small seminar for undergraduates, meeting regularly for one semester a year, to discuss some aspect of rare books and their history, or of other objects in its collection, such as maps or prints;
14. That the present research and fellows program be carefully maintained.

We have concluded this review convinced that the JCB, as an institution committed to the preservation of major collections and the advancement of learning, is in good shape. The recommendations for change we have suggested will improve it in performing these essential functions. The changes proposed in cataloguing are the most important of all our recommendations. But we do not wish to underplay our additional recommendations. They are all calculated to enable a fine institution to retain its remarkable vitality.

The John Carter Brown Library is an independently funded and administered institution for advanced research in history and the humanities, located at Brown University since 1901. For further information about the Library, write to Director, The John Carter Brown Library, Box 1894, Providence, Rhode Island 02912, or visit www.JCBL.org.

